

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Eloise's last dark secret is out, how will they react?

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Silence reigns as Eloise's words hang in the air for a long, drawn out moment. Thomas waits for the blow up from Camilla... but to his surprise, it never comes. Eventually, he looks over at the red head and arches a brow, surprised that she's not yet exploded at Eloise for what she's done.

Camilla looks back at him, bewildered and like she doesn't know how to react. Which... seriously? She's not the least bit upset about this? Color him surprised...

Eventually, the way he's staring at Camilla makes her squirm enough that she breaks the incredibly awkward silence.

"My Lord?"

Huffing, Thomas shakes his head.

"Our first day here in Last Hope, you threatened to kill me if I did anything untoward to Eloise. But now you stand there silent?"

It just felt a little hypocritical to him. He had moved past his initial interactions with Camilla of course, ultimately accepting that they'd gotten off on the wrong foot in a big way. They were in a much healthier place now... especially considering they shared a bed most nights. Still...

Camilla's face goes red and she drops her gaze, unable to meet his eyes.

"I can only apologize for my actions back then Lord Thomas. I did not act in a knightly or honorable manner. Regardless of what I thought I knew, it has

become incredibly clear that I was wrong about you. I hope I can make it up to you, given some more time in your service.”

That... wasn't the point. Thomas groans, running a hand down his face.

“Sure, Camilla. But what I'm trying to say is that I'm surprised you're not a lot angrier at Eloise here, given what she just told us.”

There's a quite pause at that, during which Camilla looks at Eloise for a long moment. The mousy brunette with her red face and watery eyes looks somewhat like a drowned animal right now. Even though she's not wet, she just looks... singularly miserable.

“... Well, my own personal feelings are meaningless in this moment, Lord Thomas. Ultimately, I am yours to command... and ultimately, *you* are the highest authority in all of Last Hope. Back then I... erroneously decided that I was more of your warden over your knight. More of your minder than your leal servant. Now... the relationship between us is clear. Whatever you decide to do regarding Ms. Harper's actions... I will follow your lead.”

That was a really nice way of saying 'the ball's in your court', Thomas couldn't help feeling. Camilla had just said a whole lot of words, but what they boiled down to in Thomas' opinion was 'I don't know what to do, so I'm waiting for you to tell me what to do'. Which... well, it was an improvement over Camilla going off half-cocked and doing her own thing like she'd done all those months ago.

Indeed, the female knight was a bit of a meathead, so perhaps it was better that she wasn't enforcing her own binary view on the situation. On the other hand, Thomas really didn't know what to do here himself for one simple reason... he didn't feel all that violated by Eloise's actions. Why? Well...

“That's all well and good, but I do need you to weigh in here as one of the affected parties. After all, I wasn't the only one who Eloise spied on all these weeks.”

Camilla flicks her gaze over to Eloise again, who in turn shrinks in on herself, looking miserable as ever. Silence falls once more for another long moment before the red head just shrugs.

“I’ll follow your lead, my Lord.”

Seriously?! Fine, Thomas would spell it out for her... for both of them.

“You may not want to do that, Dame Camilla. Because at the end of the day, I am a man with all that entails. As a man, it’s rather hard to feel violated when I find out a beautiful woman has been watching me bed another beautiful woman. So hopefully you can see my problem.”

Eloise squeaks, eyes widening and face going red. Camilla, meanwhile, also goes a little more red as she blinks.

“Ah.”

Feeling a little exasperated with the whole situation, Thomas nods.

“Yes. Ah. So when it comes to who Eloise wronged, you are the one I want to hear from the most here, because I cannot just forgive her for her trespasses at your expense.”

That finally seems to get through to Camilla... who promptly shrugs anyways, looking slightly embarrassed as she reaches up and scratches her cheek.

“... Well... I suppose, ah... that it’s not so different for a woman either?”

Thomas stares. Eloise lets out another squeak. Camilla shrugs again.

“Or at least, it’s no different for me anyways. I’ve never really had a preference.”

He... thinks he knows what that means, but he still pushes for clarification all the same.

“A preference?”

Her face is very nearly the color of her hair now as Camilla nods.

“Yes... man or woman, it doesn't really matter. I've lain with both before.”

So she was bisexual, though Thomas doubted it was called that in this world. Still, that was... good to know. Even if it put some particularly saucy mental images in his mind's eyes. His imagination runs rampant for a moment considering all the sorts of things Camilla might have gotten up to as a knight before she wound up in Last Hope with him.

He manages to yank himself out of the moment of fantasizing when his daydreams take a turn for the personal and the man and woman Camilla are with transform into him and Eloise respectively.

“I see. So... just to be clear, you do not feel maligned or violated by Eloise's actions? At least not to the point of demanding retribution of some kind...”

Camilla shakes her head wordlessly. Thomas watches her for a moment before asking a question that's started scratching at the back of his mind during this conversation.

“Camilla, what exactly is the context of our intimacy?”

Blinking, Camilla scratches her cheek again.

“Well... you are my Lord, of course...”

When Thomas' face becomes stormy, she hastens to explain herself.

“However, as I said previously, that is that and this is this. If I had to explain why I enjoy being intimate with you... it is simply knowing that I can put my entire trust in you. It is rare to find someone like that, someone who you know will not hurt you in any way. We fought the King of the Forest together. You saved my life, making sure I got out of there in one piece. More than that, we are both

quite strong. Healthy. Active. I find sex with someone as physically impressive as you to be more stimulating than sex with others.”

That all... sounded about right. Though Thomas is belatedly realizing he maybe should have asked Camilla this question in private because Eloise is as red as a tomato at this point, her wide eyes flicking between him and Camilla in flagrant disbelief of what they're talking about in front of her.

Which... is fair. They've gotten a bit past Eloise's actions, haven't they? Clearing his throat to get her attention, Thomas meets Eloise's eyes.

“Don't do it again, Eloise.”

His commanding tone makes the Mayor's daughter straighten up instinctively and nod rapidly. Then, her mind catches up with her body's reaction and she stops to blink dumbly at him as she realizes what's happening.

“... That... that's it? That's all you're g-going to do?”

Thomas shrugs.

“I mean, what more do you want from me? We've got bigger things to worry about right now. We're on a one month deadline to find this Spider-Queen and slay her so that I can trade her mandibles to Sevinarya in exchange for your father's cure. And if Camilla isn't upset with you and I'm not upset with you, who am I punishing you for anyways? Yourself?”

Eloise fidgets and squirms for a moment before biting her lower lip. Thomas arches a brow and finally, her shoulders slump.

“N-No... of course not. I uh... I promise, I'll stop.”

Thomas nods decisively.

“Good then, that's all I need to hear. Camilla, I assume the same goes for you?”

The red head just shrugs again.

“Like you said Lord Thomas, we have other things to concern ourselves with. The Darkwoods is a big place... finding this ‘Spider-Queen’ in under a month might very well be impossible.”

Nodding, Thomas sighs.

“Which is why we’ll also work on Plan B on the side as well...”

They all fall quiet at that, contemplating the prospect of having to capture Sevinarya Vairath in order to try and force her to do their bidding if they fail to find this ‘Spider-Queen’ in the allotted time.

Finally, Thomas claps his hands together and grins crookedly.

“Well then we’d best get started. Eloise, we’re going to need to know where to find the giant spider nests that you do know about, alright?”

Still looking absolutely amazed that she was ‘getting away with it’, Eloise slowly nods.

“Y-Yes... I mean yes! Yes, of course...”

Heh, she looks a little shellshocked. Definitely a bit dazed and confused. But eh, Thomas just chucked it up to what would be called ‘pretty privilege’ back on Earth. If you were hot, you got away with a lot more bullshit. Simple as that.

And yes, Thomas was well aware that he’d probably feel quite differently about things if Eloise were a man or even just not as attractive. However, being aware of that didn’t stop him from not really caring all that much that she’d watched him and Camilla go at it like rabbits though.

If anything, it was kind of hot... but he wasn’t about to be the one to suggest a threesome even with everything that had been said so far. If it didn’t go over well

with both Camilla and Eloise, then he stood to lose some of the respect he'd spent months now building up.

Eloise writes down directions to what spider nests in the Darkwoods she knows about and given they're on a bit of a time crunch at this point, Thomas and Camilla don't bother just sitting around waiting for this new monster to fall into their laps or anything like that.

Instead, they gear up and head out as soon as possible, only bothering to stop at Beatrice's, Lahn's, and Arnold's on their way out of town.

From Beatrice the Blacksmith, they both get a couple of new, freshly sharpened daggers, because obviously having a way to cut oneself out of a sticky situation is going to be critical with what they're hunting.

From Lahn the Tanner, Thomas finally gets to pick up his new leather armor. It's quite serendipitous that Sevinarya's visit and ultimatum lined up with the completion of the set of armor, all of which was made entirely from the massive hide of the King of the Forest.

The shoulders even had fur from the hulking beast sewn into them, and the whole set looked suitably impressive in Thomas' totally unbiased, entirely humble opinion.

Finally, from Arnold the Apothecary, they received the usual potions on top of some antivenoms as well as potions designed to dissolve webbing, an even better tool than the daggers, more than likely.

And with that, he and Camilla were ready to head out into the Darkwoods and see what they could find. To be clear, Thomas wasn't so optimistic that he thought they were going to stumble across this Spider-Queen on the very first day or anything like that. But he was moving with some serious pep in his step.

Honestly, while he would certainly never say it out loud, it felt good to have a purpose, so to speak. His Gift of Relentless Potential was designed to feed off of him striving, obviously, but there were definitely different levels of striving and

Thomas was starting to reach the point where he could feel a noticeable change in those levels.

Striving to beat something like the King of the Forest, a monster that had truly felt like an insurmountable challenge, was not the same as striving to protect Last Hope from Dire Wolf or Goblin Attacks. And that in turn was not the same as striving to help out around town with daily chores or doing a few laps around Last Hope's circumference each day.

Each of these things represented a new 'tier' of striving, and if he had to put this latest challenge somewhere in those tiers, Thomas would definitely put it closer to trying to kill the King of the Forest than anything else. With only a month to find the Spider-Queen and put it down in order to save Eloise's father, he was feeling more motivated than ever!

And really, in the end... wasn't that motivation all that he needed to overcome any obstacle in his path?

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A/N: Such optimism! Too bad the Spider-Queen isn't real...

Please let me know what you think either on Patreon or Discord! Your feedback, suggestions, and ideas for this story are keeping the inspiration flowing in a big way!